The SCEPTRE

March 1931

KATHERINE BELLAMANN

HENRY BELLAMANN

EMMA COTHRAN
Criticizes
H. L. MENCKEN

BOOKS REVIEWED BY

DEAN MCLEAN
MARION TOWNEND
RENA HARRELL
LUCY WOODWORTH

EDITED BY MARY GROOME MCNINCH

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◆

by Lizette Woodworth Reese

APRIL WEATHER

Oh, hush my heart, and take thine ease,
For here is April weather!
The daffodils beneath the trees
Are all a-row together.

The thrush is back with his old note;
The scarlet tulip blowing;
And white-ay, white as my love's throat—
The dogwood boughs are growing.

And Grief goes out and Joy comes in,
And care is but a feather;
And every lad his love can win,
For here is April weather.

QUEEN'S GARLAND

THE QUARTER'S VERSE

Emerson has spoken of the poet as the representative of mankind who is harmonious in all his powers, and whose privilege it is to articulate beauty. Certainly a great poet is in harmony with that part of the universe of which he sings. Certainly such a one as Poe worshipped beauty, which he sought, and would express in words.

As we catch the faint undertone in a symphony, an undertone which we later recognize as the theme working itself into our understandings; or, as above the wail of the wind, the shepherd hears the tiny bleat of his lost lamb; as one finds a brilliant yellow dandelion amid the grass and weeds—so you can find, perhaps, a worthy thought, a glimpse of beauty, in these our small attempts at verse.

We call your special attention to the two poems of Dr. Henry Bellamann. (Dr. Bellamann, author and musician of note, is at present residing in New York City. Formerly he was, with Mrs. Bellamann, a professor in the music department at Chicora College.) The poem on page five, "Tell Me, Traveler," has not been previously published, and his many friends here will appreciate his having sent it, as they say, "Special to the Sceptre". "A Charleston Garden", page six, appeared in Addison Hibbard's recent "Anthology of the Lyric South", and is reprinted because if its vivid picture qualities. Both are excellent pieces of work, and because of our personal interest in their author, we are very happy to print them.

—*The Editor.*

by Henry Bellamann

TELL ME, TRAVELER!

I always think there must be special weather
In far off places like Peru:
Do clouds go by in gorgeous feather,
And are the hills a peacock blue?

In China where the old pagodas tower,
And gates and doors are painted red,
Is moonrise like a budding lotus-flower,
As Chinese books have gravely said?

Off Siam, is the sea like fire, or glassy?
Their lightning, is it blue or green?
Are banks along the river soft and grassy,
And has the dew an opal sheen?

Is noon in Argentine just noon, or charming?
Do Southern stars seem fiercely changed?
Is not that hemisphere alarming
With all the seasons disarranged?

* * * *

Old Marco Polo must have seen much weather
Between his Venice and Cathay:
Summer and snow—maybe the two together,
And one half night and one half day.

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by Dr. Henry Bellamann

A CHARLESTON GARDEN

I love old gardens best—
tired old gardens
that rest in the sun.
There the rusty tamarisk
and knotted fig trees
lean on the wall,
and paper whites break rank
to wander carelessly
among tall grasses.
The yellow roses
slip from the trellis,
and the wistaria goes adventuring
to the neighboring trees.

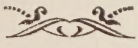
The forgotten comfort
of the wilderness comes again.
The legend of the twisted walks is broken,
and the marble seats are green
like woodland banks.

by Inez Dellinger

GLIMPSE

Land-bound I was.
I thought, Someday the sea!
It will be vast and seemingly infinite;
I will be lost in the greatness of it.

One day from a white beach for a few minutes
I saw the sea.
It was small.
"This is not of what I dreamed.
I can reach out and touch its end,
Or walk around it."
Small, small sea.



by Inez Dellinger

FOOTSTEPS

"Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street."

—Stevenson.

Modernity equipped with brazen wheels
Sweeps on to find what never has been found;
I hear no sound of friendly passing feet;
The gods of Hurry-Up have seized our street.

There is a rush and roar that brings unrest;
Tranquility, dismayed, has taken flight;
Old-worldness, quite forgot, admits defeat;
I hear no footsteps passing down our street.

by Inez Dellinger

TO A POET OF AN UNKNOWN LANGUAGE

Words are tricky sentinels to guard your golden thoughts;
Lose the key, sink away, the door is locked.
Yet I can think what is there;
A poet is without an age or race;
Time and language are incident.
If you sang of suns and winds,
I could understand.
If you spoke of love and death,
Are they strange to me?
If you thought bewilderment, desire,
Have not I?

Keep the secret—do not tell me more:
I know enough to understand
Ancient ciphers from an unknown hand.

by Rebekah Hassell

ELEGY ON A LITTLE GRASSHOPPER

Poor little grasshopper, lying quite prone
There on the pavement—Summer is gone;

Your little tune so merry and shrill
Used oft to cheer me; now it is still.

You cannot rise on your lovely fan wings—
Just one cold moment ends all such things.

Last night the frost killed the grass and you,
My dear little green-winged fellow, too.

by Rebekah Hassell

THE JAPANESE FLUTER OF THE SEA

In moonlight on the rocky shore,
A flute held in his fingers light,
A lonely form moves into sight.
He plays his mournful notes, which soar
And wind among the boulders slow'r
And slower in their wand'ring flight—
Those notes once roused the warriors' might,
The valiant Samurai of yore.
The waves play their accomp'niment
To his shrill treble. Gentle winds
Run slender fingers through his hair
And play about his loose garment,
Till, merging with the gnarled old pines,
He leaves mute rocks and silent air.

by Ariel McNinch

HERITAGE

My mummie is sad,
Cause my daddy is went
Off on a trip wif God;
I wish I had
The penny I spent,
I'd buy her a picture card.

I'm up on her lap,
Huggin' her near,
I hates to see mummie cry;
I've tooken my cap,
And wiped off a tear,
There's no one to love her but I.

WE RECEIVE AN INTERESTING LETTER

Knowing of the interest felt here by the former Chicorans and consequently by Queens-Chicorans, we ventured to address ourselves to Dr. and Mrs. Bellamann that we might congratulate them upon their successes in the fields of music and literature. We also took occasion to ask for something from the pen of these two.

Dr. Bellamann's poems you will find in the poetry section. A very interesting review of Mrs. Bellamann's first novel is among the book reviews, and we now take the privilege of publishing a personal letter from Mrs. Bellamann—a letter full of charm and intimate glimpse of this writer. See what she has to say to you young writers! We await her "now partly finished" novel in the assurance that it will be delightful.

The letter, addressed to us, follows.

—*The Editor.*

"Thank you for your kind letter. Both Mr. Bellamann and I feel a special interest in Queens, since it has included in itself the college with which we were associated for so long a time. You will find enclosed herewith a poem of Mr. Bellamann's which has not been published elsewhere.

"And thank you also for your kind words about my new novel. I am frequently asked by those who know of my long years of work in musical fields if this means a departure from music for literature. Literature is a big word, and one book doesn't make a writer. I am a busy teacher of singing in the busiest city in the world and I took time to write "My Husband's Friends" because I thought I had something

to say about the troubled question of modern marriage. I felt that among all of the contemporary ways of regarding that institution, there were certain fragments that deserve to be salvaged from the wreck of Victorianism. And those fragments I have attempted to weave into a story of a modern woman faced with the manifold problems that must in even greater degree harass the coming generation. The story of this novel is not autobiography. If it were it would never have been written. Only the thoughts on the situation's problems are my own thoughts. They express my point of view.

"Yes: I shall write more. There is a new novel on my desk, now partly finished. But writing, unless something quite unforeseen happens, is not likely to take the place of my life-long profession.

"A good many letters have come to me asking advice about writing. I am too much of a beginner to be able to answer them. I can only say what my own experience has been. I have always thought about writing although I have not always wanted to. It looked like hard work and I discovered that it is! So if I have any advice to young writers at all, it would be this: Don't try it unless you are willing to slave at it, and don't begin writing until you have something to say.

"Thank you again for your kind letter. May I, through you, extend greetings to many old acquaintances in Queens?

Cordially,

KATHERINE BELLAMANN."

200 West 57 Street
New York City
17 March, 1931

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by Ariel McNinch

HER REAL SELF

She entered the office whistling, this small stenographer. Having hung up her short fur jacket and absurd red turban, and filled her mouth with gum, she prepared for the day's work.

Oh, those clothes! High-heeled red shoes, a dress of some cheap figured material, and the gaudiest of all gaudy jewelry, including several bracelets, an anklet, and a would-be-diamond necklace! With these she adorned her person.

Your first glance would probably be filled with contempt for such a creature, but if only you would look again and see her eyes! Eyes sparkling with beauty, and yet so full of sadness that they seemed almost unable to bear their burden. These were the eyes of a dreamer. Always they had expected so much from the world, and always so little was given. She had tried very hard to be happy, but it was evidently the fault of fate who had conspired with joy and tricked her.

A little working girl, all alone in this world, that is who she was. She had no friends—she was too poor to have any, and it seemed almost as though life had mocked her by bestowing upon her an unconquerable pride. The tiny head was held high, very high, and the laughing world went its way, oblivious to the fact that in this office a pitiful tragedy was being perfectly concealed beneath a bit of tawdry finery and a red, red lipstick.

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by Emma Cothran

H. L. MENCKEN'S SHORTCOMINGS

With as many enviable and profitable qualities as Mr. Mencken possesses, it is unfortunate that his ability should be directed into channels that obscure these good qualities and that emphasize glaringly his shortcomings. He is a zealous scholar and has developed the alertness of his mind in elaborating upon his gift of natural intellectuality. He has acquired a remarkable range of information both general and specific, as is shown in his detailed discussions of varied subjects in his essays. His exact appreciation of all the arts is almost incomprehensible. He is a keen observer of human nature, and, with his remarkable ability to grasp resemblances, he conveys by cleverly selected but apparently insignificant details exactly the impression that he has received. His readers wonder why they cannot do the same thing with the same simple words that he uses.

Mr. Mencken's cleverness is demonstrated in the way in which he handles a trivial subject with all the detailed and careful observation that he would apply to a paper on the "Explanation and Practical Application of Validated Theories of Governmental Administration." In his essay, "Scientific Examination of a Popular Virtue," he presents an entirely new aspect of the quality of gratitude, and treats this so-called virtue in several different situations. The essay is an exhaustive psychological argument in favor of a paradoxical view of the motives and mental consequences of gratitude, and is very convincing.

These qualities of subtleness and cleverness are products of Mr. Mencken's marvelous sense of humor, which, however, is so piercing and energetic

that it loses discrimination and applies itself to his most serious subjects. I do not mean that there are any subjects from which humor should be completely excluded because humor is the "eau de vie" of literature. However, drunkenness at church is scorned by even the lowest degenerate, and Mr. Mencken's ridicule of religion is inexcusable. He is intolerant of religions just as he is of other people's opinions.

It is Mr. Mencken's theory that every critic expects his readers to adopt his own principles of criticism, and a certain amount of this self-confidence is an aid, not to say a necessity, in writing convincing criticisms. However, Mr. Mencken exaggerates this self-confidence to the exclusion of all consideration of any other critic's opinions.

Nevertheless his humor is directed into other, more welcome channels, for in his essays on dry subjects of criticism, with which the higher intellectuals and recognized literati would delight in boring us. Mr. Mencken presents his views in a clever manner, that is amusing, if his extreme self-satisfaction at the realization of having discovered something new can be at least momentarily disregarded. Throughout these iconoclastically informal criticisms he is sure of his admiring gallery all the while.

And this admiring gallery is the spur to his exaggerated egotism, from which all his other shortcomings spring. He knows that the public is waiting for his new ideas, or, more exactly, his new expressions or discoveries, of old ideas. This public must be satisfied, and also they must retain their high opinion and devout admiration of their demigod. To keep his public in this frame of mind, Mr. Mencken often resorts to exaggerated statements that he does not honestly believe, in their entirety. No one with

rational thoughts could believe the things he says about the South in his essay, "The Sahara of Bozart", because in the first place a great many of his statements are undeniably false. In this essay he denounced the South for its lack of culture, intellect, breeding, morals, and leadership, with which he claims the North is filled to overflowing. His manner is at first disdainful and contemptuous, then fiery with anger against the criminal indolence of the impoverished South, and finally insultingly condescending. It does no good to present facts in refutation to a man like Mencken, because it is ridiculous to suppose that he does not realize the untruth of his own statements; and a man as positive as he is will juggle facts to suit his purpose, and use the opposition to support his own statements. He may convince people who perhaps are already prejudiced by sectional feeling, or who accept him blindly, because he has established his prestige on the imposing but fragile foundation of self publicity and conceit; but the ones who know the facts, and whose opinions Southerners really value, will disregard him with merely a smile at his loud and ineffectual protestations.

He debases American people as a whole and their ideas, with extreme naturalism, and they praise him for his iconoclasm. This blind praise leads him to believe that because he is H. L. Mencken he can say anything and have his public acclaim his utterance; or perhaps he does not realize that by expressing such views he sets himself up to be laughed at and ridiculed mercilessly by his public.

This effort of Mencken's to impress his readers leads him to another serious fault. He tends always to be merely stylish in his criticisms, and to give the public what they want, regardless of his own true be-

liefs in his statements. It has been said that a critic, in order to be great, must fight against this rigid adherence to popular tastes, and must have a philosophy and a creed. He must believe in some definite principle in order to have a basis of criticism. No great literature, as has also been said, has ever been written except by a man who looks beyond and believes in the supremacy of mankind; for it is this optimism that develops his idealism, and this faith that vivifies his prophecies. But the only thing that Mr. Mencken believes in implicity is the eternal supremacy of H. L. Mencken, as the representative of super-mankind. Consequently, he has more than a few adversaries.

However, Mencken clothes his writings with an air of saying something entirely new and extremely important, and some people accept his maxims as such, when they have been practicing these same principles ever since time was.

An example of these "startling revelations" is his refutation to the argument that he has no creed. He sets forth three principles of belief to which he holds tenaciously. They are: First, it is better to tell the truth than to lie. Second, it is better to be a free man than a slave. Third, it is better to have knowledge than to be ignorant. These maxims may be admirable foundations for an inviolable creed, but beliefs merely stated and not applied can hardly be claimed for one's personal rule.

For example, Mr. Mencken could retract his statement from "The Sahara of Bozart", that there are no little theatres below the Mason and Dixon line, and thereby escape a great deal of merited comment against the integrity of his word.

Also, there may possibly be a few people who deny Mr. Mencken's slavery to his public, but most prob-

ably these people classify this state of bondage as a necessary means of livelihood, or perhaps as a far-fetched compliment, that the public is so enthralled with the writer's works that they will await his next production with breathless expectancy, and it is his pleasure to satisfy them. But find the difference between conceit and over-rated self-respect, and you have the same difference that applies here.

The third division of Mr. Mencken's beliefs is the only one that can be applied to him, but even then he expresses this theory as if all ignorance, including unavoidable feeble-mindedness, were an intolerable vice. He boasts subconsciously of his wide field of knowledge, and disdains the poor unfortunate hoi-polloi who are not H. L. Mencken. This corollary attitude to his maxim could hardly be called admirable.

His enthusiasm is the main method of convincing his public of his ideas, but this enthusiasm, like a great many of his other good qualities, has been over emphasized until it has gone beyond the optimum intensity and has become a serious fault. This enthusiasm permeates his thoughts and fills him with an intolerant conviction, that thrusts him headlong into his arguments. He keeps his eye on the goal without watching his method of approach, other than the swiftness and accuracy of it. He gathers speed and aim by means of the strongest statements he can use, without regard for their malice, untruth, or offside aim; and through this intensity he often gives the impression of insincerity, and consequently defeats his purpose of convincing his readers.

Mencken makes use of this over-worked zealousness in unfavorable as well as in favorable criticisms. He goes into his arguments fully convinced of his own

viewpoint and determined not to be moved by anyone's else opinions. He has the air of being offended by any opposition whatsoever, and this attitude is immediately revolting. It turns the public against him when he is trying to convince them, and by overstepping the boundaries of effectiveness, the critic becomes an object of derision. Such vitriolic criticisms detract from the joy of reading.

But in situations like the one just mentioned Mr. Mencken gives free rein to his abundant gift of satire, and mercilessly flays the object of his criticism. Perhaps courtesy should not be considered in literary criticisms, but still there are certain limits at which discourteous criticism becomes unadulterated insult if tact is completely disregarded. In his essay, "The Heir of Mark Twain", Mr. Mencken sneers at the pretensions of Irving S. Cobb to equal his famous predecessor. He lets flow a violent torrent of sarcasm with the vehemence of an uncontrolled child. To prove his point he states the jokes of Mr. Cobb in a flat, matter-of-fact manner that would spoil the humor of Mark Twain himself. It would be interesting to read Mr. Mencken's eulogy of some of his own jokes that are little better than those he has criticized so destructively in Mr. Cobb. The small concessions that he grudgingly and shame-facedly gives to the humorist, turn the readers in favor of Mr. Cobb rather than to the side of his persecutor.

In spite of Mr. Mencken's gift of rare humor, he belongs to the morbid school of destructive criticism, that is pessimistic, cynical, and skeptical. He attacks and attempts to tear down old beliefs and principles, but offers nothing constructive in place of them. In his essay, "The Cult of Hope" he admonishes the American people to abandon many of their present

attempts at reform, but gives them no substitute activity or theory upon which to vent their worthwhile complex. And even while Mr. Mencken is destroying their theories and giving no constructive advice, he is exhorting them against this very process of half-hearted improvement, and thus he goes against his own teachings even while teaching so vehemently. Nothing could be less convincing than this paradoxical practice. With such theories Mr. Mencken pretends to be improving the world and doing people good. It is his obvious desire to have the whole universe under his control, but with him as super man the whole cosmos would be one colossal joke. May he learn that criticism, in his case, like that famous biblical quality, should begin "chez-lui", for the satisfaction of his readers at least, even though it be destructive without being constructive.

by Edith C. Storm

MUD

He had mud on his heel when he returned—Mud on the heel of his shoe; usually so carefully polished. That was the only reminder we had of this unobtrusive man's absence after his wife's death.

There is mud in his wife's garden. He often spent his evenings there under her gentle guidance. She would softly reprove him for wearing his office shoes in the flower beds, and as softly remove the clinging clay.

There is mud in the country after a spring shower. They liked to tramp, that quiet pair, among the fields. They liked to sit on fallen logs and tumbled rocks, and dream aloud.

There is mud on a new-made grave.

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by Rena Harrell

COMIC RELIEF

We who by heredity and environment
Are prompted to exalt
The serious, factual pages
Of those who give Knowledge
In philosophical and psychological terminology
Are weary. A vacant mood is ours
In spite of open book. And,
Delving in the past, we lovingly
Recall—a childhood clown,

Of comic face and motley robe,
And half a hundred tricks, all droll.
Oh, he was fun; we laughed at him.
A clown—why yes, but then he knew
What all of us are slow to learn:
The blessedness of foolishness.

by Ariel McNinch

METAPHOR

Occasionally I think of you.
Just occasionally.
And because a native thinks
Sometimes of a snake,
Does that mean that he
Would welcome its sight—
Would run to meet it?

INTERESTING NEW BOOKS

MY HUSBAND'S FRIENDS

By Katherine Bellamann, New York: The Century Company, 1931

Reviewed by Lucy Woodworth

In speaking of "My Husband's Friends" I feel that I can add nothing further to what has been said by Anzia Yezierska in the New York Herald Tribune Books of Sunday, February 22, 1931, so I quote her review verbatim as follows:

"This is an astonishing first novel. Told in the first person, it is as intimate as a diary or as a love letter, but without the raw immaturity of the confessional school of writing to which it emphatically does not belong.

"A woman marries a scientist of distinction and charm—a man whose austere appearance and facile adaptability makes him irresistible to women. But the story is not wholly of women. Men, too, invade the sanctity of Nina Perryford's life. The chapters afford a panoramic view of these men and women. Each one is struck off with an unforgetable clarity and precision. There is the young poet, boyhood friend of the husband—a parasite; one is almost embarassed by the dispassionate analysis of this individual. There is the subtle and exotic actress; the hilarious young girl 'in open revolt against convention'; the worldlings of New York; the dark and tragic figure of Judith Sarnoff.

"With all of these Nina fights in silence. When this battle becomes too tense she arrays woman against woman and becomes the spectator. All of his

'attachments' are to him mere social encounters. Nina, in her life-long struggle, attained to a philosophy, step by step, won her way to a release that was an answer and a crown to her existence. This novel, written by a Slav or a Jew, would have been a tragic story of futility and frustration. It is the sweet reasonableness of Anglo-Saxon sanity which in the end makes Nina mistress of an island of isolation. She has overcome possessiveness and maintained a fluid attitude to a day-by-day kind of living that enables her to escape defeat. But now in her final security she is beyond the reach of her husband's call when he does need her. That this does not assume aspects of tragedy is another triumph.

"Two phases of the novel stand out after reading. One is the sane and wise philosophy which is expressed now by a cutting irony and keen-edged wit, and again by a beauty of language and a formal restraint. The other is the amazing characterization. Every character, even those who step in for a page only, comes sharply and vividly alive.

" 'My Husband's Friends' is not a promise, but an achievement."

CATHERINE THE GREAT

By Katherine Anthony, Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, (Copyrighted, 1925, by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.)

Reviewed by Dean McLean

Some one has said that biography is the best form of history. Without entering into an argument as to the truth of this statement, it is certain that a careful

reader of "Catherine the Great" will find the book an interesting narrative of the history of Russia throughout the many years Catherine passed in that territorially wide-spread country.

Born of German parents in the little North-German town of Stettin and christened Sophie Auguste Friedrike, this poverty-stricken princess, at the age of fifteen, received an invitation from the Empress Elizabeth to visit the Russian Court. As this meant that the eye of the Empress was fixed upon her as a possible bride for the Grand Duke Peter Feodorovich, nephew and heir of the childless Empress, the young girl and her mother eagerly set out upon the long and uncomfortable journey. At the end of six weeks they reached the Russian capital where they were given a cordial welcome by the reigning sovereign.

Almost immediately preparations for the marriage were begun, the first step being the conversion of the little princess from the Lutheran faith to that of the Greek Church. This having been accomplished without opposition on the part of the candidate, in the baptism which followed the German name was washed away and the princess emerged as Catherine Alexevievna.

Until the death of Elizabeth the Grand Duke Peter and his wife, the Grand Duchess Catherine, endured a hampered existence in which there was neither congeniality nor affection. Peter was a weakling from the beginning to the end of his unhappy life, while Catherine developed a strength of body, mind and will that carried her to all lengths.

The Empress died and in less than two weeks after Peter's succession to the throne, Catherine had her husband murdered and herself proclaimed as Empress of all Russia. Like Napoleon at a later date, she

placed the crown upon her own head; she administered to herself the Holy Communion and made herself the head of the Church of Russia, as of the State.

She maintained peace with France and Austria, both of which she hated, and kept up a semblance of friendship with Frederick of Prussia. Her chief interest lay in attaching her border provinces to herself and in enlarging her boundaries on the south at the expense of the Turks. Two Turkish wars were fought with sufficient success to arouse the jealousy of the western powers. France, England and Prussia chose that Constantinople remain a Turkish possession rather than fall into the hands of what might become a rival State.

In the first Partition of Poland Catherine was a prime mover, with Maria Theresa and Frederick of Prussia as aids and abettors.

Regarding internal affairs, the "Little Mother of the Russians" stabilized the currency; instituted a better system for taking the census; broke up monoplies; put down rebellion; led a campaign against smallpox, herself submitting to vaccination; established Foundling hospitals; and for three hours each day for three years wrote out instructions for a new code of laws.

With the passage of years old age came; her lovers were lovers no longer; her once magnificent body yielded to disease; and after her death not one of the explicit directions she had left for her burial and for the inscription to be placed on her tomb, was carried out.

So passed the woman who, dissolute in morals and murderous in mind, had nevertheless ruled with such power at home and maintained herself so successfully against her enemies abroad, that those very enemies

crowned her with the title by which she is known in history—Catherine the Great.

Miss Anthony in this book, published by the Garden City Publishing Company, has given us a very readable book indeed. The style is clear and direct and altogether pleasing, while the content holds the interest throughout.

THE SPARTAN

By Caroline Dale Snedeker. Doubleday Page. 1930. (Issued 1912 under title "Coward of Thermopylae")

Reviewed by Rena Harrell

The Spartan is the story of the boy Aristodemes who inherited from his Athenian father a love of song and a warmth of spirit that were alien to the stoicism of his mother's people.

Bereft of his father whom he adored, the solace of training-camp period was his ilarch-captain, Leonidas. As he grew older, a kind heart was in the young man Aristodemes, and we see him purchase a child, Mendi, from abusive thieves with the price of his inherited Athenian robe.

As a soldier we see him fail his country woefully at Thermopylae and branded a coward therefore. The coward is shown loathing his own existence. But Aristodemes had been only weak, not cruel, and slowly the restoration of his character sets in. The wearisome journey to Delphi accomplished, he learns of Mendi's highborn parentage and takes him, in spite of personal sorrow at his loss, to his philosopher-father. Then it is that Aristodemes, triumphantly scorning danger, enters the thickest of the fight to

defend Athens from the Persians and wields a powerful sword in defense of his country. But not there can he stop; there is necessity—a spiritual compunction—of his returning to fight where his failure had been enacted with his Spartan group. Here he wrought heroically and died with the peace in his heart of having made restitution and fought as a brave and daring soldier.

Leonidas, Makaria (Aristodemes' mother), and Pindar are all well delineated by Mrs. Snedeker who has a sympathetic understanding of those institutions and that worship which were dear to the heart of every true Spartan and every true Athenian. The melody of ancient, beautiful things and the mystic air of temples where votive rites are performed give a delightful atmosphere to the book which is in refreshing contrast to much modern fiction.

The author's style is pleasingly liquid always and at times she surprises one with some happy conception exquisitely phrased. Such expressions as, "the leafy canopy full of whispers" (of dryads), or "the moonlight listens and expects" are thoroughly charming because, as she herself says about the springtime, there is an element of surprise in them. However, much, declares she, heralding of spring there may be, beforetime, we have forgotten during the bleak winter months how beautiful the blossoming earth is and, consequently, experience renews each year an unexpected pleasure that is dearer because it is unexpected.

The book gives a rich reward for the investment of one's time or money therein. It is not beyond a child's comprehension, yet it is a book that can be recommended to any person of any age whatsoever.

by Marion Townend

STILL ANOTHER CHAT ABOUT BOOKS

Anyone interested in recent book news ought to read what William Lyon Phelps said in March Scribner's about the award of the Nobel prize to our Sinclair Lewis (the first American to receive it). Aside from the honor there is the not inconsiderable sum of $40,000 attached to the award.

Of Van Dyke's comment (you remember he called it a questionable, left-handed compliment to the United States) Phelps says, that the Europeans delighted in "Main Street" and "Babbitt" not only because they like to think of Americans as self-satisfied boosters, but because they are so familiar with the type in Europe—Anyway, left-wing, radical or no, Lewis has succeeded in creating characters that are known all over the world.

Speaking of characters makes me think of a startling, new book I've read recently in which the characterization is unusually fine. "Grand Hotel" by Vicki Baum. Each character is as clear cut as a cameo. It is brilliant, but loses much by the author's desire to shock. Its extremes remind me very much of "the little girl with the curl down the middle of her forehead". If the scene which is so similar to the theme of "The Way of All Flesh" were left out, the book would gain by the omission. Perhaps she was writing for German readers; perhaps Americans still possess Puritanical prudery, but for me its artistry and genius were harmed by that scene of yellow—journalist kind of realism. The character of Kringelein, a poor wretch from the provinces who comes to the "Grand Hotel" with a few months to live, only to

discover he has never lived, is a masterpiece. We can, through Kringelein's senses, feel the sensation of the danger and thrill of the first automobile ride, a first airplane ride, the first complete outfit of luxurious clothes, a theatre. In those few months he lived more than he had in his forty years. Kringelein says: "I should never have found the courage to live had I not known I had to die . . . When it's on your mind you have to die, it makes you capable of anything." And there's Baron Gaigern, and the dancer, and the soldier with one side of his face disfigured, and a host of others. I imagine the play, which is in New York at the present time, playing to crowded houses, is even better, because on the stage these flaws of which I speak would necessarily have to be removed.

Arnold Bennett's new novel, "Imperial Palace," is about a hotel also. Judging by thoroughness and detail, the book is a fine textbook on "How to Run a Hotel". But as a novel it is insufferably long, with a stupid, manufactured plot, and colorless characters. A pretty far cry from "The Old Wives' Tale."

I read a book of a few years ago, the other day: "Gallows Orchard" by Claire Spenser. It was a find! For stark tragedy, relentless, rushing forward to its inevitable end, it was a veritable "Odeipus Rex"—told in the first person by a likeable, real person who deeply loved the leading character. A beautiful thing.

Dorothy Canfield's "Deepening Stream" is admirable. A few lines can't begin to do justice to such a book. It is so full of a number of things. It is an experience to read it.

Selma Lagerlof's "Ring of the Lowenskold" is well worth reading. Twice winner of the Nobel prize, she has a number of splendid novels to her credit. This one is a trilogy of three short novels.

In biography, Archibald Henderson's "Contemporary Immortals" is very worth reading. In it we have ten men and two women whose present-day fame he claims will live—there are Edison, Mussolini, Ghandi, G. B. Shaw—Can you guess the others?

"Up From Bloomsbury", the autobiography of George Arliss, is great. Sheer fun—most of the way—with illuminating passages all the way—about plays, players, and playwrights.

Walter Damrosch's book "My Musical Life" is splendid, too—genial, humorous, and noble like the man, a happy combination of genius and aristocracy.

W. Sommerset Maugham's "Cakes and Ale" (or the Skeleton in the Closet) is quite a scathing satire on formal biographies.

Having just finished Thomas Hardy's biography "Early Years and Later Years of Thomas Hardy by Emily Hardy," I can speak with a little more authority on the much mooted question. Did Maugham have Thomas Hardy in mind when he wrote the book? I think he used Hardy as a sort of lay figure—as a sort of departing point—for several facts of his subject's life are identical with Hardy's. Otherwise the book is purely imaginative and a vehicle for satire, and as such very clever. Maugham admits himself that probably the subject is neither the man the sensationalist tries to record nor the one the formal biographer gives, but something in between.

Certainly the writer of Hardy's life is no sensationalist! This is how she speaks of her marriage to Hardy (when he was 74 years old): "In February of the year following, 1914, the subject of this memoir married the present writer."

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